

SOME GREAT PREACHERS AND WHAT THEY TEACH US.

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Personal character is a study in the pursuit of which our minds may be profitably exercised. On the one hand those traits which, with common propriety, belong to all, confer on the subject a peculiarity of interest, while, on the other hand, individual distinctions preserve it from the sameness which might, without such diversity, render it somewhat insipid. Our study, in this article, will be confined to but a few clerical characters, who are denominated *great*, and the principal lessons taught by their lives—those who being dead yet speak—"Living epistles known and read of all men."

1. As a personification of earnestness and spiritual energy we go back to 673 and select the venerable Bede. The space allowed this article forbids lengthy biographical sketches of these ministerial fathers. We must content ourselves with a notation of some of their more eminent labors. Bede was an acknowledged power in his day; determined, without being obstinate; ambitious, but not supercilious; pressing earnestly his cause, and yet wholly unsuggestive of selfishness; a man of God, who had learned to glorify the Divine Father by the practical use of those gifts and graces with which the Master had endowed him.

In his gigantic efforts to collect materials for his ecclesiastical history, his researches in religious literature, and his translation of almost the entire Bible into the Saxon tongue, we would suppose Bede to be a man of much physical strength, as well as vigorous mentality; while his devotion to religion from his sixth year until his death, his love for the young, and his manifest desire to spend and to be spent for the sake of the church and the church's Christ, bespeak his undoubted spirituality.

Falling at his post, with the armor on, in the midst of life, and at life's vast work, a chant upon his lips, Bede, the venerable, expires, perhaps the greatest spirit of his day—a light amid surrounding gloom, a beacon in the darkness.

From the life of Bede we derive a stimulus to religious activity and constant devotion to the cause of Christ.

Too many of God's children seem indifferent, listless, or lost in the crowd—seeing nothing to do—hearing no particular call to service for Jesus. Like a great column that has never filled its niche in some magnificent temple lying in decaying beauty, unheeded and out of place. Arise call upon God. "Forgetting the things that are behind" press forward, for

they only who transform day by day from character to character, in the midst of life, in the midst of work, in the midst of duties, are changed into the image of Christ.

2. In 1497 in Saxony began the life of Philip Melancthon, the synonym of classical accuracy, literary precision, and philosophical profundity, conjoined with mildness of manners, amiability of disposition, and general sweetness of character.

Perhaps to Melancthon, whose German name was Schwartzerd, the church is indebted for the reformation which is commonly attributed to Luther. Luther, the Peter of the reformation, violent, impetuous, rushing ahead—if right, all right, if wrong, all wrong—could never have succeeded in evolving organic forces from the wreck and debris of Romanism, had it not been for the calm, conciliatory temperament and discriminating judgment of Melancthon. In Melancthon we find that rare combination of high scholarship and logical acumen, with gentleness and kindly temper, which made him a man sought by men; one who could meet the Pope, whom Luther had enraged, and leave him temperate and kind, and who was competent to hold as in a mighty spell the Court of the Inquisition, the Electors, and the Emperor alike.

Failing to promote the cause of unity in the church, which seemed after all the object of his most cherished ambition. Melancthon succumbed under weakness of the body and distress of mind. So another star fell from the church's spiritual horizon.

Melancthon's life induces to slow, cautious deliberation, and withal, loving gentleness in the governmental management of the church. Our own department of the church of Christ, as yet in her infancy, great schemes still to be inaugurated and developed, coming as she did out of a late reformation—for 1882 and 1883 recording the deliverance of the National Conferences at Ashland and Dayton, are nothing less than years of reform beginnings, as much needed as any through which the people of God have passed—it would be eminently helpful, especially for our ministry, to study the character and catch the spirit of this lovable Saxon and copy him as he copied his Divine Master.

3. We hesitate, lest we may not do justice to the theme, before introducing our next subject—Joseph Alleine—the young Evangelist of the fifteenth century, who so often, like our beloved brother Paul, suffered bonds and imprisonment for the Master's sake, and who at last gave his life for the cause he had espoused.

Alleine's "Alarm to Unconverted Sinners" interprets the aims, ambition and character of its author. There breathes a soul divinely impatient for the restoration of lapsed humanity, one whose deepened spiritual experience came to his assistance as he sought to tell the perishing the awful sinfulness of sin and the tremendous misery of the lost, and delineate, in a thoughtful literary picture, the enormity of the guilt that dismisses the offender from the presence of God.

Alleine was burdened with one theme—the salvation of sinners; and like the immortal Knox, the hero of the Scottish reformation, who from a little enclosure near his home was heard at midnight praying: "O Lord, give me Scotland or I die! Lord, Lord, give me Scotland or I die!" Alleine, the youthful servant of Christ, with a burning love for lost men, poured out his soul in earnest, continuous labors for the world's salvation, and then breathed away his spirit, a martyr of Jesus, having finished his work.

It was right for Elisha to beg the spirit of Elijah. It was eminently proper that Elijah should let fall his mantle on his spiritual son and when we, God sent, appear before the restless, hopeless, graceless, Godless congregations we sometimes meet, to do revival work, while we pray above all for the spirit of Christ, it would seem sinless to me to covet, too, the spirit of Alleine.

4. Next to this faithful evangelist we notice Robert Raikes, the benevolent Gloucester Journalist to whom belongs without dispute the honorable title "Founder of the Sunday-schools." Mr. Raikes was born in 1735; and after completing his literary education succeeded his father as editor, publisher, and proprietor of the Gloucester Journal.

Although not an ordained clergyman Mr. Raikes probably did more actual preaching in his day than any of his religious contemporaries belonging to the regular ministry. Hence we class him among the great preachers from whom we wish to learn lessons of love and wisdom and grace.

In Mr. Raikes we have an example of a hard working, busy man, whose great heartedness led him to perform the humblest offices to the poor and the outcast even at huge individual sacrifices; and whose purse was always ready to help the needy; a man who had fortunately learned that the secret of genuine happiness does not lie in personal possessions, but continual serving.

One thought from the life of this noble soul we would seek to make emphatic. Realizing the great need of Christian instruction for the poor, and particularly